



Playground



Potomac River waterfront

the wealth of recreational space contained in the City. However, it also indicates that many of these sites are small, and that some areas of Alexandria (e.g., the far west end and the northeastern sector) do not contain as many recreational spaces as other parts of the City.

- **Rivers and Streams:** Areas included in this category comprise some of the City's most significant open spaces. One of Alexandria's major attractions, both for residents and visitors, is its beautiful Potomac River waterfront. Bounding this shoreline, both to the north and south, are several other significant waterbodies – Four Mile Run, Cameron Run and Holmes Run. Other stream valleys include: Taylor Run, Timber Branch, Backlick Run, Strawberry Run, Hooffs Run, Lucky Run, Great Hunting Creek, and Old Cameron Run.
- **Urban Plazas and Streetscapes:** In Alexandria, the eleventh densest city in the nation, urban plazas and park-like streets and boulevards represent important open space opportunities. These elements provide excellent venues for community activity, offer a sense of open space relief, provide attractive spaces and corridors, and encourage pedestrian use. Alexandria has not yet maximized its open space opportunities in this category (see Figure 11). The City contains only a few significant urban plazas, such as Market Square and King Street Station. In addition, it has a limited number of streets that could be de-

Legend

- Resource Protection Areas
- Streams
- Environmentally Sensitive Areas
- Parks



Figure 7: Environmentally Sensitive Sites



Market Square







Streetscape in King Street

scribed as “park-like boulevards.” Examples of the best of these include Commonwealth Avenue, Fort Williams Parkway, Seminary Road, Beauregard Street, Quaker Lane, and Jordan Street.

• Service Areas

The service area category describes the general range of users for each open space area. Some open spaces attract users from throughout the region (and often beyond), some primarily attract users from the City as a whole, and some attract mostly neighborhood or smaller block area users. Based on the open space inventory, it is interesting to note that each planning district has its own character with regard to the populations served by its open space areas. For example, Planning District 1 contains perhaps the greatest number of regionally-served open spaces (63 percent of all of the open space in this district); for Planning Districts 2 and 3, only 24 percent and 19 percent of their open space areas respectively are considered regional in scope. For those open spaces serving a citywide population, almost one third of the areas in District 1 fall into this category, as well as 32 percent in Districts 2, and 34 percent in District 3. On the other hand, almost half of the open spaces in Districts 2 and 3 (44 percent and 47 percent respectively) can be categorized as serving primarily neighborhood or block service areas, while only 5 percent of the open spaces in District 1 can be described in this way. On a citywide basis, it

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-  Resource Protection Areas
-  Streama
-  Natural Resource Areas
-  Parks

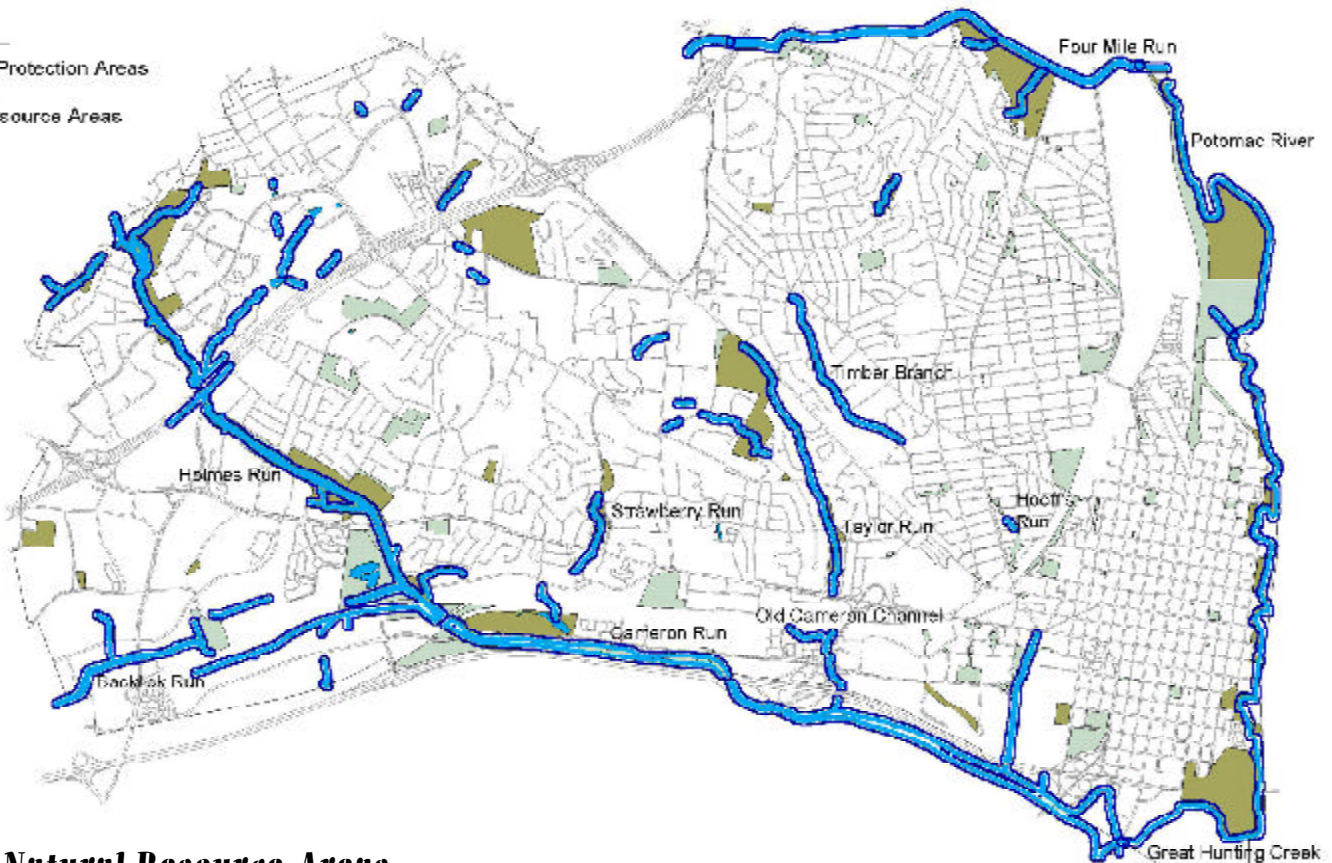


Figure 8: Natural Resource Areas

appears that Alexandria offers a good mix of different types of open spaces areas intended to serve a variety of populations and purposes, although the focus of who is served varies significantly between areas.

- *Ownership and Maintenance*

Most of the open space areas included for consideration in this planning study are publicly owned and maintained. Of the 22 significant privately-owned open spaces identified, only eight have been classified as “private with no public access.” The remaining 222 acres, although privately owned, are typically made accessible to the general public, if even for limited use. There is no guarantee in place, however, for this practice to continue.

Of the approximately 932 acres of public open space in Alexandria, more than three quarters of that land is owned and maintained by the City. The remaining quarter comprises land owned and/or maintained by the National Park Service, the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

F. PARK SYSTEM INVENTORY

The 116 public open space areas included in the Open Space Classification

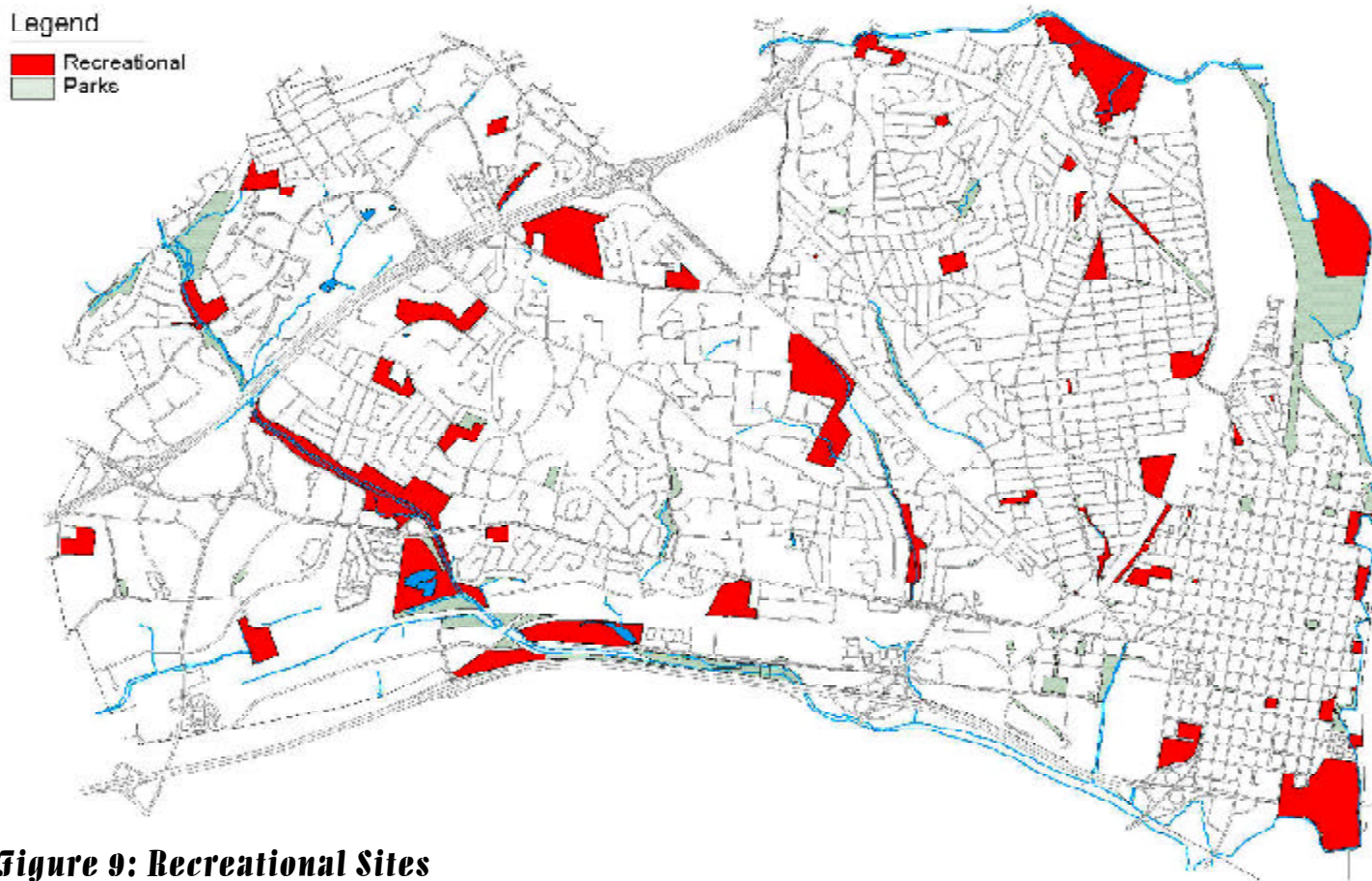


Figure 9: Recreational Sites

matrix were inventoried as part of the planning process. The inventory provided a more in-depth “picture” of the status and characteristics of each open space area. The inventory included the following specific elements:

- **Site Overview:** a general description of the area including its location, site characteristics, and uses
- **Cultural and Viewshed Features:** a description of views both into and from the area, view-related issues, cultural elements both within and visible from the area, and social/cultural functions of the site for its community
- **Areas of Concern:** observations related to issues such as accessibility, parking availability, the need for fencing/buffering, site conditions, and so on.
- **Additional Comments and Observations:** comments vary from the notation of positive features of the site, to suggestions regarding improvements that might strengthen the use, appearance, and connection of the site to its surrounding area.

An inventory form was completed for each site, as well as a locational map and site photographs. The completed inventory is contained in a separate volume, *City of Alexandria Open Space Inventory, 2001*, available through the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities.

Among other factors, the inventory assessed current site conditions and suit-



Figure 10: Rivers and Streams

ability of the site to meet its programmatic intent. Nearly three quarters of the sites inventoried were evaluated as either “excellent” or “good” at meeting their intended programmed uses. The remaining quarter were assessed either as demonstrating a mismatch between site program and surrounding context (e.g., a play area for children that requires access from a heavily trafficked street, with no adequate crosswalk to the facility), or a disconnect between existing facilities and intended programmed uses (e.g., a passive park that provided a setting in which to sit and linger but did not provide an adequate number of benches).

In terms of overall condition, four general issues emerged as important to consider in improving the status of existing open space – particularly public parks — in the City. These include:

1. **Locational Issues:** many of Alexandria’s smaller parks, particularly those in the City’s more dense areas, are located close to busy streets. This presents both noise and potential safety issues. New parks, where possible, should be set back or buffered from busy streets. The challenge for existing parks is to buffer them from these adjacent streets while still allowing for visibility into the sites for security. In addition, locations adjacent to busy streets, without adequate crosswalks near the park, often present access problems, particularly for children. Broader locational issues related to the distribution of parks throughout

Legend

- Urban Plazas
- Streetscapes
- Parks

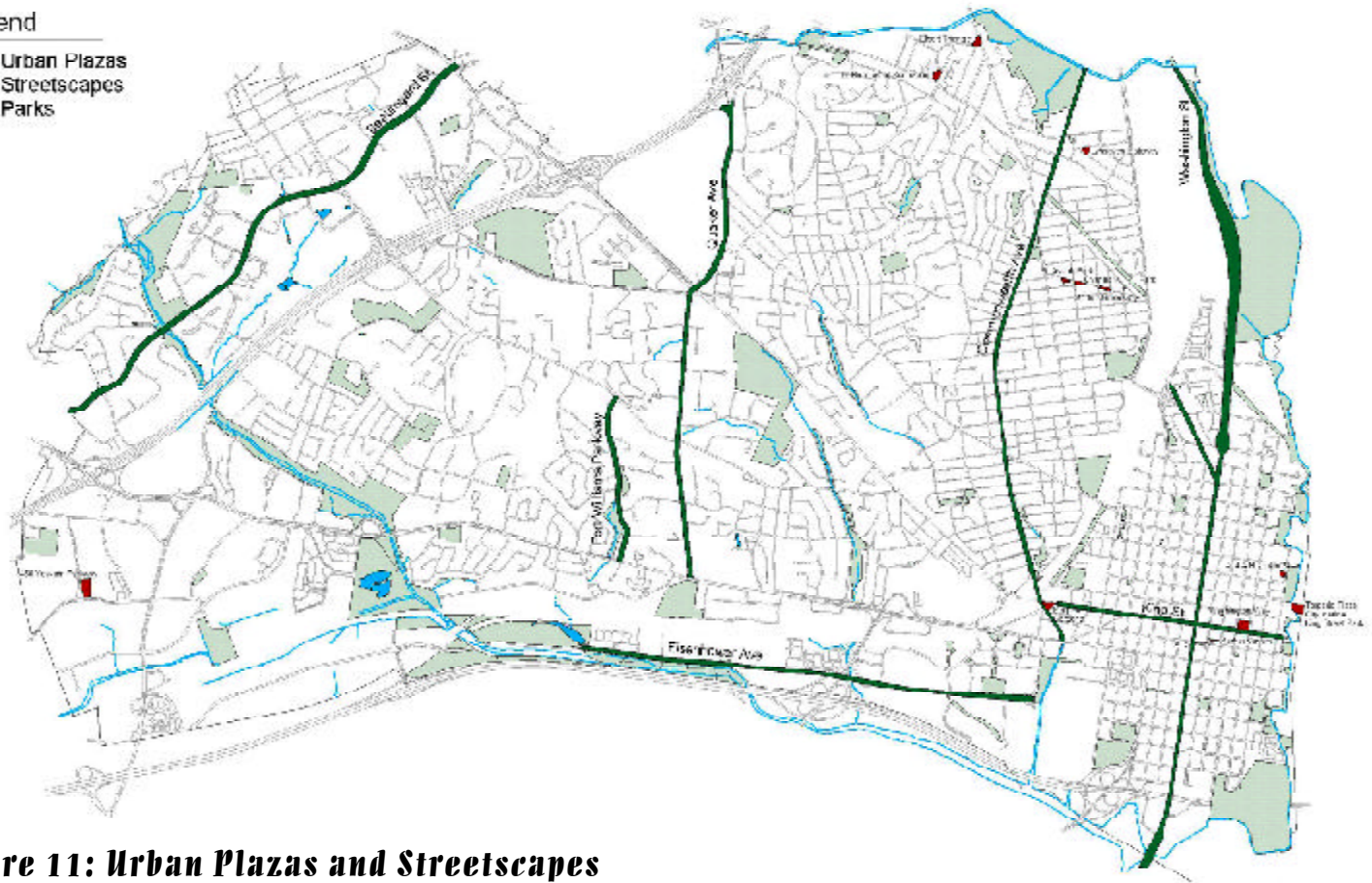


Figure 11: Urban Plazas and Streetscapes

the City are discussed in Chapter 3. Open Space Needs and Issues.

2. ***Design Issues:*** a number of the City's older parks present problems related to their current designs. For example, one of the traditional concerns about urban parks is the degree of visibility they afford from surrounding areas in order to minimize crime, vandalism, and the occurrence of illegal activities. In a number of the parks inventoried, visibility problems were noted, related to several factors: location (e.g., in interior areas that do not permit adequate views into the park), elevation level (e.g., parks that are sunken or elevated), areas that are surrounded by dense vegetation without compensating security measures (such as increased lighting), and inadequate lighting in general.

The inventory also identified instances where additional amenities would strengthen a park's program, such as improved seating (particularly in shaded locations), fencing, interpretive signage, and facilities that allow for greater accessibility by handicapped persons. Site design issues that were also apparent included: maximizing linkage opportunities for connecting parks to nearby trails and to other community open space areas; clearly defining park entrance locations; and configuring the site so that its programmatic uses are apparent to all and so one use area does not conflict with another.

3. ***Environmental Issues:*** Several environmental issues were noted during the public open space inventory, including erosion problems along stream banks and on steep slopes, as well as potential water quality and drainage issues. In addition, many of the City's public open spaces contain wonderful natural resources. The general public should be made more aware of these elements through interpretive/educational and preservation programs.
4. ***Maintenance Issues:*** While many of the City's parks are in outstanding condition, maintenance issues were noted in a number of instances. These included: old and worn play equipment, overused turf areas (particularly on athletic fields), overgrown trails and streambanks, cracked pavement areas and, in more natural areas, the need to remove invasive plants.

Overall, the City's parks are in good condition, but an open space plan must begin by maximizing existing resources. Hence, the inventory of public open spaces provides Alexandria with input regarding those aspects of its current open space that could be improved.